

ARSLANTEPE – THE MOUND OF THE LIONS

HERE 5,000 YEARS AGO THE “STATE” WAS BORN

ARSLANTEPE is an artificial mound over 30 metres high (1), which created by the superimposition of settlements built on top of each other for millennia, and emerges above the gardens and orchards of the village of Orduzu, near the waters of the Euphrates. Sun-dried mud bricks, which were used to build houses and public buildings at Arslantepe, as in many other sites of the Near East, return to be soil when the buildings are destroyed and collapse, creating huge deposits that rapidly grow to form “mounds”. These **mounds** are pieces of history that the archaeologists sift through, layer by layer, putting the fragments of our past back together.

Arslantepe - *Arslan* (=‘lion’) and *Tepe* (=‘hill’) - probably owes its name to the presence of two stone lions that adorned the gate of an early first millennium BC palace, which were visible to travellers who discovered and documented the site at the beginning of the 20th century (2).

Regular excavations began in the early ‘30thies of the last century with a French mission led by Louis Delaporte. After Delaporte’s death during the Second World War, the operations were resumed for a short period by the archaeologist Claude Schaeffer, who soon left the site after few campaigns (1948-1951).

An Italian archaeological expedition guided by Salvatore Puglisi (at the very beginning together with Piero Meriggi), started working in the site in 1961. Since then, the project, become one of the main archaeological projects of the Sapienza University of Rome, was uninterruptedly carried out with systematic excavation campaigns under the direction of S. Puglisi first, then Alba Palmieri and today Marcella Frangipane, in a close and fruitful collaboration with the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey.

Under metres upon metres of ruined cities built on top of each other, an ancient palace complex was brought to light, which provides evidence of the emergence of one of the world’s earliest state systems

A flourishing economic, political, religious, and administrative centre arose at Arslantepe in the 4th millennium BC, when the first Mesopotamian urban societies were emerging along the Euphrates and Tigris banks. Monumental public buildings, pottery, metal weapons, and thousands of impressions of beautiful seals have been unearthed at the site, providing documentary evidence of the birth of one of the world’s most ancient state systems, and revealing that this phenomenon involved, besides Mesopotamia, also the mountainous regions of Eastern Anatolia.

THE BIRTH OF ÉLITES AND THE FORMATION OF THE STATE

Around 10.000 BC, food production started in the Near East and the first villages sprang up in Eastern Anatolia, some with beautiful shrines. Starting from 5500 BC a few families dominate upon others, marking the end of the egalitarian society.

Arslantepe lies in Eastern Anatolia, at the heart of the so-called *Fertile Crescent*, where human groups, approximately 12000 years ago, started to cultivate cereals and domesticate sheep and goat, cattle and pig (3). Food production permitted a sedentary life and the first permanent villages were founded with large rectangular houses and imposing sanctuaries, which, through ideological and

religious practices, held together these communities. The clear distinction between domestic structures indicates the starting autonomy of individual families within society.

The new type of economy brought about a gradual increase in production and food surplus, the birth of specialised labour and an increasing competition between families. Some of them emerged acquiring higher status. They accumulated goods, mainly staples, and, by redistributing part of them to other less privileged members of the community, increased their power and prestige. The first hierarchies thus developed in all regions along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers approximately 7500 years ago. The South Mesopotamian model, based on hierarchically differentiated extended families living in large tripartite houses, expanded to the north. In the Malatya Plain, the site of Değirmentepe, with its tripartite buildings clear Mesopotamian in character, attests this influence.

THE 4TH MILLENNIUM B.C. AT ARSLANTEPE

THE GREAT TEMPLE (Period VII, 3900-3450 B.C.)

Arslantepe was certainly already occupied in the 6th and 5th millennia BC, but we have not yet sufficient information on this crucial formative phase.

Numerous and remarkable findings have however revealed that the site gained a great importance in the region in the 4th millennium BC, when it became one of the first state societies based on centralised power.

Between 3900 and 3450 BC (Late Chalcolithic 3-4 or Arslantepe Period VII) a paramount group of leaders with religious prerogatives emerged. In this phase, the settlement of Arslantepe expanded over the entire mound. Ordinary houses extended as far as the north-eastern edge of the *tepe*, while imposing public and private buildings were built in the central and highest part of the town, creating a clear separation between different social and functional zones. Here stood an **élite residence** with decorative columns and white walls, painted with red and black geometric motifs (4b).

A huge temple structure, **Temple C** was built on the top of the mound, close to the élite residences: This building, monumental and isolated, stood on a platform of huge stone slabs and mud, and had – unusually for Arslantepe – a typically Mesopotamian ‘tripartite’ floor plan (4a): a large central room with niched and painted walls was flanked on both sides by small facility rooms. These communicated with the main hall through four symmetrical doors.

Over 1,000 mass produced bowls have been found in Temple C (5c), some abandoned on the floor of the central hall after use (5e), others, more abundant, piled upside down in the lateral rooms, where they must have been stored in huge quantities (5d). In one of these small rooms, were also numerous *cretulae*, clay sealings bearing the impressions of stamp seals (5a-b). The presence of such a high number of bowls together with the *cretulae*, as well as the numerous entrances to the main hall, are all evidence of the ceremonial and administered distribution of meals to a very large number of people.

The power of the nascent central authority must have gained strength from its religious and ideological role, but it was also founded on the prestige deriving to the élites by the control of food, redistributed in ceremonies and feasts. The temple was not only a place of worship, but also the centre for many different public and economic functions. This system closely recalls the parallel developments occurred in the Mesopotamian society. Pottery, seal designs, and the painting itself however show completely local features, sharing little with the proper Mesopotamian world.

The goods that were redistributed to the population had first to be handed in at the temple as offerings or taxes. They increasingly became a means of financing the production activities of the temple and its representatives, the priests, who as community leaders probably demanded services.

Although food distribution probably took place as part of a ritual, it was also a way of paying people for their work, as is suggested by the fact it was carefully regulated through sealing practices. The high status leaders, thanks to their public role as mediators with the divinities, not only acquired prestige and political authority, but also the ability to control food circuits and, through them, to a certain extent labour. *Social inequality, with time, created economic inequality.*

But how was this crucial change accepted by the people? The accumulation of wealth by their leaders on the one hand appeared to be ideologically "repaid" by services to obtain the benevolence of divinities, on the other hand was also used to support some members of society by engaging them in productive activities and 'paying' them with foodstuffs.

A new system of privileges had arisen, which became self-sustaining.

THE FIRST "PALACE" (Period VIA, 3400-3000 B.C.)

Between 3500 and 3400 BC, Temple C was abandoned, but the system based on the centralization of resources and their redistribution developed rapidly, hastening the process of social differentiation and formation of leading elites: Arslantepe became one of the first and most important State centres in the ancient world.

By 3350 BC (end of Late Chalcolithic) a huge complex of public buildings was built on more than 4,000 square metres south/south-east of the abandoned Temple C, and spread over much of the southern sector of the settlement (6), which was conversely now smaller than in the previous period.

This imposing architectural complex comprised buildings of differing shapes and functions (7): areas for storage, food redistribution, administration, and religious practices, which, according to recent findings, seem to be directly related to a residential élite area on the top of the mound. The complex was planned as a single whole, though it was built in successive building phases, as a sort of progressive enlargement. For all these reasons it can therefore be considered the first known example of a **public palace** – not necessarily as the chief's residence, but certainly as a complex architectural area intended for these chiefs to perform their different public activities (religious, economic, political and administrative).

The entrance to the palatial complex was from the south through a monumental gate with a long corridor rising up the slope of the ancient mound, and leading to different sectors built on various terraces (8): higher up were the areas devoted to worship and official events, while in the lower areas economic and administrative functions were performed.

The architectural analysis has evidenced, as already said, that the palatial complex, even though at the end all in use contemporarily, was not built all in once, but gradually, starting highest up the mound and later expanding downhill. The earliest core of the complex was not far from the abandoned Temple C and was mainly characterised by the presence of a new temple (Temple B). Other buildings were progressively added, greatly widening the public area and transforming it in accordance with the ever increasing need to separate the activities and functions of the new central institutions.

The public area, which was now much larger and more composite, no longer indeed merely consisted of a holy place where the manifold activities performed were all ritualised and legitimated by ceremonial practices, as in previous Temple C, but the various related buildings with different architectural features, were also intended for being the seat of explicitly secular activities and functions. In particular, specific spaces were used for economic and administrative activities, which involved a very large number of people and were probably carried out in a regular way.

The élites of the end of the 4th millennium, whose residences, as in the previous period, were on the highest part of the mound, embodied more and more the government institutions of the

community, expanding their activities and functions, which were performed in the various buildings extended down the slope.

A **long and wide corridor** led people to a **large courtyard**, where an **imposing monumental building** rising to the north linked the public area with the elite residences (9a). The courtyard and the building were the arrival point for the people entering the palace and the heart of power. At the entrance of the building, leading into the courtyard, a plastered platform with three steps was probably the basement of a wooden seat, perhaps a “throne”, and was visible from the entrance of the palace. In front of this platform, two small clay bases seem to constitute standing points for people presenting themselves to the chief or ‘king’ and paying homage to him (9b).

This building and courtyard represent a **very precocious expression of a secular power** that for the first time was exercised directly without any form of religious mediation.

The ‘Palace’ Temples

Two “temples” were included in the palatial complex, but they were small in size and less accessible to the public. This indicates a loss of importance of the religious component in the political and economic management of the community.

The two buildings used for worship, **Temple A** and **Temple B**, were indeed decidedly smaller and less accessible to the public than the previous Temple C. The room used for worship no longer communicated with the outside, except for two windows, which could be closed and barred with wooden shutters, whereas wall decorations were only present on the outside, in the entrance room (10). Internally the main rooms were more specifically designed for worship, with an altar against the end wall and two *podia* with a fireplace in the centre; in Temple B a low platform was also against the long wall facing the two windows. Three small clay tables, one of which was still well preserved, were perhaps used for offerings. The two buildings had only one row of service rooms and no longer two rows on either side of the main cult hall, as in Temple C, thus becoming “bipartite”, instead of “tripartite” as in the Mesopotamian tradition.

Distribution of meals was still performed in these buildings, as testified by numerous ceramic containers and a small number of *cretulae* used for sealing them. But these temples were mainly the place for élite and restricted ritual practices. Religious ideology now seems to have played a minor and different role in public life.

Large quantity of food and drinks was prepared and ritually consumed in **Temple B** by a restricted number of people belonging to the political and religious élite.

Numerous vessels containing both liquid and dry foodstuff (10a-b) as well as large cooking pots were found in the main cult hall in Temple B. The interdisciplinary analyses used in archaeology today allowed to reconstruct the activities carried out in the building: Flint blades had cut meat, a large grinding stone and a mortar in the small corner room had been used to process cereals and legumes, whereas the presence of hare and larger quantities of mature cattle among the abundant animal bones, probably meal residues, marks the difference from the faunal assemblages found in other areas of the palatial complex. The vessels in which food and drink was served and consumed, particularly mass-produced bowls, were few and had a greater capacity than those in other contexts such as the palace storerooms.

All this evidence suggests that large quantities of food and drink were prepared and ritually consumed in Temple B in the course of ceremonies intended for few people belonging to the political and religious élite.

Temple A, built on the margins of the public area in a later phase, suffered some changes and was reused in a more secular way. The main access to the temple was restricted with a thin mud-brick wall; the entrance hall, once decorated by plastic motifs painted in red as in Temple B, was replastered and used for the storage of foodstuffs to be redistributed; the small corner room was filled

in with large vessels as a proper storeroom. Finally, a narrow space opening onto the main hall close to the altar, which had probably been the place for a staircase, was blocked and filled in with discarded clay sealings. It is possible that originally this building, identical to Temple B in its layout and architectural features, was a cult building, but in its final phase of use its function had certainly been transformed.

The Palace storerooms and the redistribution of food: the rise of labour control, central administration and bureaucracy

The Arslantepe élites, as those of the majority of Mesopotamian regions, in the second half of the 4th millennium BC, started to manage 'public' goods and affairs by employing larger and larger sections of the population and remunerating them with food: *a class-based society was emerging*.

The centralised management of the economy was based on exploiting labour. The new élites demanded labour from the people to make the land, and probably flocks, accumulated by them through offerings and tributes, productive; this work was very likely remunerated with food, which, in this period, seem to have mainly consisted in daily meals. This can be inferred from the small size of the **palace stores (11)** – not suitable for keeping large quantities of goods – from the absence of substantial storage of grain, and the presence of numerous vessels, which must have contained processed food or meals, and liquids, of which no macroscopic traces remain **(11b)**. Meat must also have been distributed, judging from the large number of animal bones, mainly ovine, found in the small storeroom, used for food redistribution.

In this room, there was an intense daily movement of food under the control of officials, who sealed the vessels with **clay-sealings (cretulae)**, on which the persons who withdrew the goods impressed their seals, and then used the *cretulae* as 'document-receipts' of the carried out transactions. 130 *cretulae* were found in this store, some on the floor close to the containers they had sealed, some set aside in a corner of the room, some others in the collapse layers, perhaps fallen from an upper storey, where they had been temporarily kept **(12)**. About one hundred **mass-produced conical bowls** were probably used to distribute meals **(13a)**.

Large numbers of people thus went regularly to the palace to receive food rations or daily meals, now not only for occasional or ceremonial events, but as proper "wage".

The findings at Arslantepe document, in extraordinary detail, *the birth of one of the earliest centralised administrative systems*. The economic transactions in the palace were controlled by clay sealings (*cretulae*), an ancient form of receipt preceding the invention of writing.

The needs for controlling and recording the increasing outcomes and movements of goods was satisfied by using the *cretulae*, a device that had already been known for millennia. The integrity of the sealing was a guarantee of the integrity of the goods, and, once removed, the sealing became documentary evidence of the performed transaction and its author (the impressed seal was the "signature" of the person withdrawing the items). For this reason, the *cretulae*, after being removed, were kept for a while as 'receipts'.

In the palace, **over 5,000 fragments of clay sealings** have been found, 2,200 of which still bear a legible impression of **220 seals (14)**. After use, they were thrown as filling material in rooms or areas no longer in use, intended as special dumps.

Over 5,000 fragments had been dumped in a narrow space in the palace corridor in successive piles, each of which was characterised by sealings bearing the impression of the same seals and the same sealed objects. Pots, sacs, baskets and doors were sealed. The dump was the result of the final disposal phase of a sort of **archive**, after the account of the sealings, that had been previously ordered according to both the operations carried out and the officials performing them.

Bureaucracy was born, with a remarkable number of officials responsible for the withdrawals. Only few of them were responsible for the actual storerooms and a very restricted number for more than one store at once, testifying to their complex hierarchical organisation.

The wall paintings

The palace was decorated with wall paintings with stylised figures, located near the doors and in the passageways (15): these figures evoking symbols and images of power were addressing those entering the buildings the complex ideology of those days. The ideological legitimisation of power indeed still dominated in this archaic State society.

The figures, in red and black, were painted on the walls using ochre and charcoal over a white thin lime "plaster"; notwithstanding the fragile materials, they were still well preserved and have been brought to light with a delicate restoration work.

The walls of the inner corridor and other areas were also decorated with lozenge-shaped impressions, obtained by applying stamps to the wet plaster.

The paintings were later partially or totally re-painted and, in the terminal phase of the palace's existence, they were completely hidden by several layers of white plaster.

In the central room giving access to the store rooms, **two stylised human figures** were painted on the sides of a door originally leading into the back courtyard; in the final phase, this door had been bricked up and transformed into a niche, and the wall had been re-plastered, covering up the paintings. This confirms the close relationship between the paintings and the entrances and passageways in the palace.

These two paintings depicted a smaller figure (perhaps a woman?) on the left, and a bigger one - certainly a male - on the right, both standing before a table or altar with raised arms and under a roof or canopy decorated with vegetal elements and volutes. The huge eyes and red and black hair in the form of "flames" springing from the head give these figures a particular and standardised appearance, suggesting they may represent gods or shaman masks.

Another extensive painting depicting an actual scene was in the inner part of the palace corridor: **two oxen, possibly tied to a yoke, pull a chariot (or a plough?) driven by a man** outside a building schematically sketched behind this scene. Some of the typical elements in the scene (the draught oxen, the ring-shaped handle of the reins, the driver) are found, in different styles, on an Arslantepe seal impression and on a seal from the big city of Uruk in Mesopotamia, both interpreted as threshing rituals. This emphasises the symbolic relation existing between the chief and farming practices.

The development of metallurgy at Arslantepe. THE WORLD'S FIRST SWORDS

At Arslantepe, metallurgy developed to an extraordinary degree during the palace period at a time when there must also have been an increased demand for metal from the Mesopotamian centres. New types of items were produced, often very beautifully made, and different metals were used (copper, lead, silver, gold and metal alloys).

Among these objects, **twelve elegant spears**, and **nine swords**, all made of arsenical copper, were found, together with **a quadruple spiral plaque**, probably part of a belt buckle, in one single group in one of the palace buildings (16). They originally hung on a wall of one of the rooms of the building, where there was also a wolf's hide, thus also showing a ceremonial and representative function.

While the spearheads introduced a new type of spear which was to become widespread in the third millennium, these swords are the earliest ever examples of this kind of weapon, pre-dating by

almost 1,000 years the swords found at other sites. Three of the 9 Arslantepe swords had the hilts decorated with triangular motifs in **silver inlay**, in one case combined with a decorative engraving.

The joint presence of swords and spears indicates the beginnings of an emerging military apparatus and the codification of different forms of combat. Power was beginning to change character, and began to be imposed by force.

The period VIA handicraft

The rich ceramic repertoire found *in situ* on the palace floors, under the collapsed walls and roofs, show a greater variety of forms and wares, as well as a common use of the fast wheel and more sophisticated manufacture and firing techniques, in comparison with the previous period VII (17). Four main classes can be distinguished, each with different characteristics: a class of brown-reddish hand-made pottery used for cooking and storing functions; one of light-coloured wheel-made pottery inspired by contemporary Mesopotamian productions (Late Uruk) but once more with original features, which was used to make large and medium-sized necked jars for liquids and semi-liquids, small jars, bottles, and high-stemmed bowls intended for cult practices; a class of wheel-made coarse bowls, mass-produced to redistribute food in form of meals; and finally a class of hand-made fine or semifine ware with two-coloured burnished surfaces – reddish and black –, used to produce drinking and eating vessels and high-stemmed bowls, which closely recall a similar production from Central Anatolia.

The metallurgical production also shows an extraordinary development and seems to be mainly intended for the use of the local or regional elites. The chemical analyses carried out on the Arslantepe metal objects suggest that the raw material came from the northern and north-eastern regions south of the Black Sea coast and south of Caucasus. This provenance confirms the relationships Arslantepe must have had with the nomadic pastoral communities of the mountains to the north, north-west and north-east of the site. These groups, together with metal, might have brought the red-black burnished ware, which represents a novelty in the local Late Chalcolithic repertoire.

3000 B.C.: The beginning of decline and the palace collapse

The power system hinging on the palace suffered some changes in the final phase of its life: the ideological-ceremonial component declined, whereas the military and defensive one grew.

Groups coming to the Malatya plain from the mountainous regions of the North-East, which probably brought to the palace the products of their pastoral life and metals, also created tensions and instability, increasing the needs for defence. The response was the early appearance of sophisticated weapons and the construction of a fortification wall around the palace, which reduced the magnificence of the entrance gate. The wall paintings and decorations were also hidden when walls were re-plastered and restored.

The social and political tensions increased, and the power system based on the management of resources and labour finally collapsed.

The early "militarisation" of power at Arslantepe had probably been the response to both external and internal increasing conflicts. On the one hand, the mountainous populations of Transcaucasian origin, which had peacefully interacted with the site's central institutions for centuries, now pushing more and more on the Euphrates valley may have exerted an unsustainable pressure on the local system; on the other hand, the increasing economic demand of the central power over the population was not backed by a strong social structure nor by vast productive

territories, as in Mesopotamia. The structure of society here appears to have been less stratified, consisting of one leading elite controlling all the rest of the population, which conversely seems to have maintained a basically egalitarian structure. The Malatya plain, on the other hand, fertile and rich in water, was hemmed in by mountains, and therefore, whereas permitted autonomous farming by the rural population (water sufficient and easy to be captured to allow to carry out an autonomous agriculture at a family level), at the same time did not produce enough to face the steady increase in demand from the Arslantepe elite.

The system's collapse was inevitable: **the palace was destroyed by a violent fire**, never to be rebuilt.

The history of power at Arslantepe was to take a new turn, full of fluctuations, abrupt transformations, and regressions.

THE CRISIS OF THE FIRST STATE. A NEW SOCIETY ON THE UPPER EUPHRATES

THE THIRD MILLENNIUM AT ARSLANTEPE

Tribal societies and new chiefs (The Early Bronze I, period VIB, 3000-2800 BC)

After the destruction of the palace and a partial abandonment of the site, the archaeological findings show the rise of *a new type of organisation and power*, no more based on the central control of staple production and labour, but *now based on self defence and war*.

Between 3000 and 2900 BC (Arslantepe **period VIB1**), **huts of transhumant herders** with cultural traditions linked to the southern Caucasus environment occupy the area of the palace ruins (18). Pottery now exclusively consists of one single class of hand-made red-black ware closely linked to the Transcaucasian traditions.

Once temples and palace had been destroyed and all forms of administered economy disappeared, the site became a place of contention and confrontation for new political entities and different cultural worlds.

After a period of crisis, during which Arslantepe was only the place for temporary occupations by these mobile pastoralists, their chiefs took possession of the site, whose memory as a central place was certainly still alive, making it their political landmark. Arslantepe was again the main centre of the region, where the social and public practices of the pastoralists' chiefs must have taken place.

A large monumental mud-brick building was built again on the top of the mound, contrasting with the scattered wattle and daub huts made of wooden posts and mud. Besides a large reception room, the building had two storerooms full of vessels and with a number of metal objects, among which two beautiful copper spearheads. Sporadic wheel-made light-coloured vessels found in this building suggest relationships between the VIB1 pastoral chiefs and the local rural population of the Malatya plain and the Euphrates valley, who must have still partly maintained some traditions of the palace period.

North of this building, a large isolated hut was probably the chief's house. In the area around this hut, waste layers full of animal bones – mainly sheep and goats – suggest the practice of holding banquets or feasts, probably before the departure for transhumance.

Conflicts were the distinctive character of this period, as is attested by the outstanding metal weapons and the construction of a **monumental fortification wall in mud bricks**, lying on a 5 m thick stone basement, which was built on the highest part of the mound, thus forming a separated fortified area.

In a second phase of the Early Bronze I (Arslantepe *period VIB2*), the rural population of the Malatya plain settled again at the site with a village of mud-brick houses built around the big fortification wall, which was still emerging on the top of the mound. In this period, the materials found on the floors of the village, which was destroyed by fire, indicate a flourishing agriculture (kilos of charred seeds of wheat and barley, besides some fruits) and the resumption of the wheel-made light pottery in the tradition of the palace period, with new and old shapes.

The even symbolic importance of “military” power in this period is also testified by an **extraordinary burial** at the edge of the settlement, in which a **warrior chieftain** was buried with great ceremony (19-20). The tomb was in stone slabs, the ritual complex, and the burial goods consisted of many rich metal objects (21): 75 objects, among which arsenical copper weapons, tools and vessels, together with arm-rings, rings, hair-spirals and beads made of silver, gold and a copper-silver alloy. Four youths had been sacrificed on the stone covering the tomb. All these elements and the number of metal weapons (7 spearheads, 1 sword, 1 short sword, and 3 daggers) testify for the warrior role of this personage and the change in nature of power, now strongly linked to warfare.

The Early Bronze II and III: Arslantepe becomes a fortified town (periods VIC and VID, 2750-2000 BC)

Far-reaching changes characterised the history of the site and its region during the entire third millennium.

Around 2800 BC another fire destroyed the imposing fortification wall and the entire village of period VI B. A new period of abandonment followed. Herding communities, still somehow related to Caucasian and Eastern Anatolian cultures, occupied the Malatya plain and the surrounding highlands for more than two centuries. Their presence is testified at Arslantepe by wooden huts and enclosures and by small round semi-subterranean structures (first phase of *period VIC*).

These groups gradually became sedentary and, between 2600 and 2500 BC, they founded a small settlement, totally new in its general layout and domestic architecture (second phase of *period VIC*). **One large building, formed by various rooms all with identical installations**, might have hosted a small related group, such as an extended family or clan (22c).

Pottery was entirely handmade and consisted of few categories of vessels (cooking pots and large-mouth vessels) made in two main types of ware classes: one black or brown burnished, the other light coloured and painted (22a-b). Malatya shows relations with the neighbouring Elazığ region, whereas contacts with the Middle Euphrates valley and Upper Mesopotamia were almost completely interrupted or very sporadic.

A large settlement with numerous houses built on wide terraces and well arranged along streets gradually developed from those small habitation cores and progressively covered the entire hill slope in the course of the second half of the third millennium (*period VID*). **A new fortification wall with bastions** was now built around the perimeter of the settlement, thus defending the entire habitation area (23c).

Pottery is still basically hand-made and, albeit with a richer repertoire, still testifies to a local Anatolian culture closely linked to the Elazığ region (23a-b).

A new phase in the history of the site had started. There is no clear evidence of the presence of political elites, but Arslantepe newly became the main site of the Malatya plain, though in a

political system broken up into **many small local lordships**. The privileged relations with Mesopotamia ended for ever.

THE SECOND MILLENNIUM AND THE HITTITES AT ARSLANTEPE

Immediately after 2000 BC a new network of commercial relations developed in the Near East, of which the Palaeo-Assyrian merchants were the main protagonists. These had intense exchange with Central Anatolia, where they settled, founding proper colonies. The Malatya region, even though not part of this network, was influenced by them, and increasingly came into contact with Central Anatolia.

The Upper Euphrates valley, past axis of north-south commerce between Anatolia and Mesopotamia, was transformed into an east-west borderline, becoming then the new frontier between the expanding Hittite Anatolian world (to the west) and the Assyrian one (to the east).

Arslantepe, on the western bank of the river, came into the Central Anatolian sphere and became one of the key points of this border.

Between the XVI and XV centuries BC the newly born Hittite Kingdom (the so-called “Old Kingdom”) started to expand its influence as far as the Euphrates, and then strengthened its control on the eastern territories in the XIV-XIII centuries, in the Great Empire period.

The Central Anatolian influence is indeed already visible at Arslantepe in the ***Old Kingdom phase*** with the construction of an imposing fortification system, made of an earthen wall with a two-chambered gate. Central Anatolian models also closely influenced the pottery production of this period, though it however still shows local attributes (24b).

The Hittite influence progressively increased in the following ***Empire period***.

A new gate in the typical *tenaille* type (24c) and a **tunnel with a false vault** made of large stone slabs (24a), recalling the Central Anatolian posterns – though with a different function –, were built in the typical Central Anatolian architectural style. The artefacts, pottery, glyptics and metals, appear more and more similar to Hittite examples, albeit not completely losing their local features.

The city became very small and the main core of the settlement, surrounded by imposing walls with monumental gateways, moved to the northern zone of the mound, within sight of the great river Euphrates, from which the site had now to protect itself. Arslantepe became a kind of “fortress centre” on the Euphrates.

For the first time we know the ancient name of the site, from the Boğazköy texts: *Malitiya* (*melit* = honey), – then *Meliteya*, *Melid*, *Meliddu* in the Neo-Assyrian and Urartu texts. Today Malatya.

THE NEO-HITTITE PERIOD: THE REIGN OF MELID

Around 1200 B.C., the Hittite Empire collapsed. The crisis that involved all Anatolia in the XII century only slightly touched the periphery.

The collapse of the Empire did not bring Arslantepe to an end, but, after a short period of crisis and rearrangement, the site developed autonomously thanks to the Hittite administrative and political legacy, becoming the capital of a small independent kingdom, the Neo-Hittite kingdom of *Melid/Meliddu*.

The ruins of the famous **Lion's Gate** (today at the Ankara Museum of Anatolian Civilizations), flanked by two stone lion statues and decorated with splendid bas-reliefs are the greatest evidence of the importance and monumentality of the site in this period (25a). A big statue of a king, the King *Tarhunazi*, or *Tarhunza* (also exhibited in the Ankara Museum of Anatolian Civilizations today) had been knocked down as a tangible and ideologically strong sign of the conquest and destruction by the Great Neo-Assyrian King Sargon II at the end of the VIII century BC (25b).

The recent resumption of excavations in the Neo-Hittite levels has brought to light a **large pillared hall** (25c), linked to the Lion Gate, which further stresses the impression of the site's monumentality in its final maximum flourishing period. Under this hall, an imposing mud brick fortification wall, preserved for a height of 3m, was probably also linked to an earlier city gate, which however followed the *tenaille* gate of the Imperial period. **Two more extraordinary reliefs on heavy stone slabs** (25d-e), dated to the XI-X century BC and stylistically similar to those of the Lion Gate, even though not identical, have been found in 2010 and are dated to the last phase of use of this wall. The imposing fortification structures and the presence itself of these reliefs (visible in the Malatya Museum) suggest a rapid resumption of the political and military centrality of Arslantepe after the collapse of the Central Anatolian Empire.

The increasing power of the surrounding reigns and empires however caused continuous tensions in the city. Arslantepe-Melid was at first forced to pay tributes to the Assyrians, then, after the rebellion of King *Tarkhunazi*, it was conquered and destroyed by the King Sargon II of Assyria, in 712 BC.

The presence of Assyrians at Arslantepe for a short period is attested by a building constructed on the ruins of the pillared hall and the northern wall of the Lion's Gate, as well as by the finding of two fragments of clay cylinder tablets with inscriptions by Sargon II describing his glorious exploits.

Numerous inscriptions found in Assyria on the other hand tell the story of the conquest and destruction of Melid by Sargon:

"I, Sargon II, King of Assyria, King of Sumer and Akkad....., King of the four parts of the world, King without equal, against Tarhunazi, King of Melid, who violated the covenants of the gods and denied me due tribute, I drove the army and conquered the city and crushed it like a clay vase".

The archaeological findings at Arslantepe also show that the site was abandoned after the end of the VIII century BC, to be reoccupied much later, in a late Roman time, when it became a satellite small town or village of the near most important centre, at that time, of Eski Malatya (today Battalgazı).